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AUTHOR Roberts, J. T.
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ABSTRACT

At the Institut Universitaire de Technologie in Nancy, France, most English language teaching has been organized on a mixed extensive/intensive pattern. As a result of certain negative effects of the established "session intensive," another methodology was tried, called "session libre." This session involved several techniques: first, the timetable was abolished, that is, the teachers were not required to cover specific material in a limited time; second, language learning activities based on linguistic theory were developed; third, a suite of rooms was engaged in which the activities could take place. Six basic activities were involved: films, television, press, tape-library, games, and language laboratory, which were at the disposal of the English students for a period of three days. In order to monitor student productivity, attendance cards were kept and three pieces of work were required. The staff was present to help the students learn without conventional teaching. This type of teaching is sufficiently flexible to deal with each student's problems, linguistic and/or psychological. However, there are situations in which a strongly directive approach is appropriate; therefore, this method is not necessarily recommended for every language course. (LG)

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The "Session Libre" (1)

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J.T.Roberts
North East London Polytechnic

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BACKGROUND

At the Institut Universitaire de Technologie in Nancy (2), most English language teaching has for some years now been organised on a mixed extensive-intensive pattern. An account of the reasons for departing from a purely extensive 'traditional' format is given in Génin et al. (1970a, 1970b), but in brief, it was felt that learning would prove more effective if the student were periodically afforded the opportunity of massed practice, in which his concentration was not quickly interrupted by the need to turn to some other subject on the curriculum.

This article deals with recent work carried out in and on the intensive elements in the English teaching programme of the Département Carrières de l'Information, which offers two-year courses in public relations, information science and librarianship (3). Within the format mentioned, the precise organisation of English language teaching varies as between departments, but in the Département Carrières de l'Information the arrangement is that each student receives two-and-a-half hours of 'extensive' tuition per week and attends once in each of the six terms of his two-year course a session intensive (or session for short) of 20 hours spread over three days.

Each year's intake into the department (mainly girls, aged on average between 18 and 21) includes some 65 to 80 students wishing to study English as one of the two languages prescribed, and of these the vast majority have had at least six years of the language on entry. (There are also a few pure beginners, of whom no account is taken here.) In accordance with the results of a diagnostic test, each intake is divided up into four graded groups, from 'strong' (groupe fort) to 'weak' (groupe faible). Up until the academic year 1972-73 this classification system held good for both extensive and intensive tuition, so that with minor exceptions the groups were kept separate throughout the sessions intensives, in which a whole 'year' was taught simultaneously, with the teachers rotating between groups.

The year 1972-73, however, which I was lucky enough to be able to spend working in the Département Carrières de l'Information, marked a period of crisis where the intensive elements of the English language teaching programme were concerned, and this crisis led to changes in the system. Basically, the Hawthorne effect associated with the intensive sessions as a new departure was beginning to wear thin (c.f. the general acclaim attested to by Génin et al. which the first intensive sessions appear to have met with), and the attitude of both students and staff was rapidly turning

What I want to discuss here is the positive yield ensuing from the crisis, so I will summarise its causes in terms of the dissatisfaction felt and expressed in various ways by staff and students alike with just enough generalisations to convey the very radical nature of the changes which were made.

Firstly, the archetypal session intensive (or session classique as it was called in retrospect), represented little more than a simple telescoping together of twenty conventional class hours, but at the same time these twenty consecutive hours were curiously out of phase with the 'extensive' hours, since there was a sudden change-over in the intensive sessions to highly structured course-materials of a sort rarely used in the 'extensive' hours, and a marked resort to méthode, méthode in some way being associated automatically with intensiveness. Secondly, notwithstanding the general resort to méthode, it was universally evident as a result of the close proximity of the groups during the intensive sessions that the 'stronger' groups had more 'fun' activities than the 'weaker' groups, whose treatment then, by contrast, smacked the more of the Nürnberger Trichter approach, so that the impression of (an albeit unintentional) divisiveness was inevitable. A further dimension of this issue of separate groups revolved around the diagnostic entry-test, whose validity was questioned, and around the relationship between cause and effect once grading had taken place. Thirdly, it was felt that, as a result of the resort to méthode, not enough was being done to put English over as a living language rather than as an "unapplied system"; the opportunities offered by a stretch of 20 consecutive hours were being missed. Fourthly, the sessions were teacher-directed and teaching-orientated, and the learner/learning aspect was understressed. Fifthly, because of the compulsion felt by the staff to rush through the inventory represented by the timetable, the sessions were extremely fatiguing for everyone, and this consideration, combined with the fact that the urgency of the proceedings militated against the execution of work of any depth, raised the question as to whether the sessions were anywhere near as productive in terms of input or output as originally expected, or even as productive as 20 'extensive' hours treating exactly the same material might have been.

Once these issues (and others, over which in the interests of brevity I have passed) had been weighed up, the intensive sessions seemed to have been demolished as an exercise of any great value. Had there been any question of altering the timetable for the year, there might even have been a complete reversion to extensive teaching. As this question could not arise, however, the intensive sessions had to continue, and in retrospect fortunately so, because as things turned out a formula was found which I believe to have useful potential in language teaching in general.

THE "SESSION LIBRE"

The formula found was what was later christened the session libre in consideration of the manner in which it differed from the session classique. It was an attempt not to carry out a patching-up operation starting with the general structure of the session classique as given, but to go as far as possible in the opposite direction

and to observe what happened. If the results seemed disastrous, we could always retreat from the other extreme, but this is where we felt it most logical to begin.

The first step we took towards a new system was to abolish the notion of a timetable structured around a teaching programme, and with it the notion of formal teaching. We also decided to abolish the graded groups for the duration of each of the future sessions, and to put all students on an equal footing.

In place of a teaching programme, we saw a collection of 'linguistic activities', and instead of taking a timetable-blank as our guide in planning the sessions , we took a plan of the suite of language teaching rooms on the seventh floor of the IUT in which the sessions were held. We wanted to see how our ideas for 'linguistic activities' would fit in with the surroundings in which they were to take place, and what sort of activities the surroundings themselves suggested.

What we had at our disposal in the language-teaching suite was: two normal classrooms; sometimes one and sometimes two language laboratories, depending on what other teaching was going on during our sessions ; a projection room; a television room with a CCTV installation; and a room equipped with numerous sockets for cassette playback machines, of which there was a good stock in the IUT. The last three rooms immediately suggested the uses to which they could be put, namely, the obvious ones. We decided, then, to put on a continuous film-show in the projection room and a continuous video-tape show in the the television room, and to convert the room equipped for playback machines into a proper tape-library furnished with a variety of material in the form of cassette recordings.

In addition to the audio and audio-visual materials, we wanted to supply a variety of reading material, but of a type which dealt mainly with realia, and of which the basic self-contained unit of reading matter was not so long that it required all of three days to read. It fitted in both with the general objectives of the English course and with the nature of the session to choose newspapers and journals, and to term the activity based on reading material "Press". This activity needed no special equipment apart from the reading matter, and could be housed in a classroom.

While some doubts were expressed about the value of language games, we eventually agreed upon their inclusion as much for light relief as for whatever informative value they might possess, and we therefore designated the fifth of our activities as "Games".

As for the language laboratories, we proposed simply to leave them open, and to put at the disposal of the students copies of all tapes stocked, together with an index of structural exercises. The language laboratories were also to fulfil another function, to which I shall come in a moment.

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For the first of our sessions libres we ended up, then, with six basic activities: Films, TV, Press, Tape Library, Games and Language Laboratory, all of which were to be founded upon the best collection of material we could muster, and onto which we intended to let a whole 'year' of students loose. The activities would simply be at the disposal of the students, and within certain limits, as, when and for however long they wanted to engage in them. Our set of basic activities, incidentally, was not by any means intended to be definitive. We hoped that various spontaneous activities would arise, such as discussions or singing, or almost anything else the students wanted to do, provided it involved the use of the English language.

We did of course realise that there had to be certain constraints, but we wanted to keep them minimal, and by the same token enforceable. It was evident, for example, that some students might think they had found in the session libre a good opportunity for three days' holiday, and against this eventuality we drew up attendance-cards to distribute to the students, making it clear that the cards would be carefully scrutinised at the end of each session. It also occurred to us that our precautions against external emigration would not deter internal emigration, and since we wanted the students in any case to engage in some productive work, we imposed the requirement that three pieces of work be executed during each session. Two of these pieces of work were to be written and the other piece oral, and the oral work was to be recorded in one of the language laboratories on a blank tape issued to each student for the purpose. In devising the work-schedule, we also bore in mind that while we wanted the students to have maximum freedom in their choice of activities, we nevertheless wanted some circulation around the activities. Two other requirements of the work-schedule were that all work should stem from or be related to the activities, and that while it should not be so heavy as to prevent students from engaging in activities just for enjoyment or entertainment, it should be heavy enough to ensure conscientious endeavour. The formula we arrived at may sound complicated, but in fact was relatively simple. First, we created the rule that each piece of work had to be of a different type and on a different subject from the others, and that one piece of written work could be in French, but only if the other piece of written work was not a transcription of recorded material. We justified the French on the basis that the students' course programme included translation into French and summaries in French of documents written in other languages etc., but added the rider to the French rule on the grounds that a transcription plus work in French would give us no evidence of creative or communicative writing in English.

These, then, were the basic rules, and in addition to them we proposed that work take the form of a summary, commentary or criticism if it related to Films or TV; summary, commentary, criticism or translation if it related to Press; and summary, commentary, criticism, translation or transcription if it related to Tape Library. We established different criteria for summaries, commentaries and criticisms, and explained these to the students (4). Thus, for example, if a student chose to do a

summary of a film, he was excluded from further work on films by the subject rule, and from producing further summaries by the type rule. If he chose to transcribe a tape, he was excluded from further transcriptions by the type rule, from further work relating to Tape Library by the subject rule, and from writing anything in French by the rider on the French rule. To make some allowance for any of the 'weaker' students who really felt that other work was beyond them, we decided also to permit the completion of structural exercises or other work deriving from a commercial course in lieu of a proportion of the sort of work normally expected, but only by prior arrangement with the staff. As far as I recollect, no-one took this option up. Finally, we extended a general invitation to the students to negotiate with us if they wished to depart from the type of work we proposed.

In addition to the attendance-cards and work schedule, there was just one other imposition made on the students, and this was that the audience for a film was not allowed to exceed 20 at a time. Practice justified the rule because, as anticipated, films were the major attraction at the beginning of all sessions, and without the rule it would not have been possible to promote an even flow around the activities.

As far as the materials were concerned, we found that a session libre needed as much preparation as a session classique. To maintain our continuous film-shows, we had to spend considerable time gathering together films originating from English-speaking countries. We aimed to put on for each session three different feature-films, and to have three showings of feature-films on the first two days and two on the last, plugging the gaps between these showings with documentaries. We obtained the feature-films through an educational agency in Nancy, though not without certain difficulties, and occasionally found ourselves caught on the hop because the agency insisted on giving all titles in their French version. Our moment of greatest embarrassment was in finding that we had selected a silent Buster Keaton film - though in fact some students did write about it, showing that it at least had an inspirational value in provoking the use of language. But somehow the agency usually managed to pull something out of the bag for us, and while there were never any recent box-office hits, we did have some fairly interesting films such as Herostratus , Time without Pity , The Young Mr Lincoln and The Plainsman. For the documentaries, we relied on the embassies, consulates and British and American business concerns.

For video-tapes we depended mainly on an exchange scheme with institutions in the UK, and though the scheme was subject to long hiatuses, by about the middle of the year we had a reasonable if highly eclectic stock of material ranging from cartoons and children's programmes to quiz-games and documentaries on subjects such as compulsory school sport, housing problems and underdeveloped countries.

We were better off for audio-cassette recordings because the collecting of audio material had been going on for longer, and we were ourselves able to make passable recordings of news programmes etc. beamed at Europe. We tried to ensure that on each day of each session we had the news of the previous day on tape.

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Where Press was concerned, we depended on the biggest newsagency in Nancy, which happened to have a very well-stocked Anglophone section with publications ranging from The Times and The Daily Mirror to Woman's Own, Nova and Esquire, and on the day preceding each session we simply bought up two or three copies of everything available. Then, on each day of the session, we went along to obtain the latest editions of the British and American daily newspapers.

For Games we gathered together everything we could lay our hands on - mainly sets of Scrabble and Lexicon and a collection of handouts someone had once drawn up and which included crossword puzzles and lists of suggestions for language games of various sorts.

I should now explain how the staff fitted into the organisation of the sessions. Basically, each one of them generally supervised one activity, but swapped round between activities every so often. The only difficulty in this respect was that we had six activities and only five members of staff, but this was solved by amalgamating the duties of supervising the Tape Library and the Language Laboratories. The staff also of course kept a record of attendance by signing the students' attendance cards and marking them with the time whenever students decided to move from one activity to another. It was naturally further incumbent on the staff to ensure as far as possible that English remained the medium of communication throughout the sessions. In this respect we were disappointed that for various reasons we were unable in the year in question to enlist the services of a good number of native speakers, as had been done in some of the sessions classiques.

It was made abundantly clear to the students, incidentally, that the staff were present to help them to learn, but not to teach them in a conventional sense. Students could solicit the assistance of the staff whenever they wished and were free, for example, to ask the staff to check through their work and comment on it before it was finally handed in for marking. To obviate trivial questions and to promote the idea of self-help, however, a supply of dictionaries and similar reference works was distributed around the rooms.

This outlines the basic structure of the session libre. How did it work in practice? After five sessions libres, I should like to say that the results were encouraging, and even excellent, but my criteria for judgment are obviously not objective, and it was impossible in the time at our disposal even to think of setting up some sort of controlled experiment. The nearest we came to attempting structured feedback was the drafting of a questionnaire, but we abandoned the attempt firstly because in the time available we could not arrive at a satisfactory format for the questions, and secondly because we came to realise that the results would in any case reflect the same Hawthorne effect as had the early sessions classiques. I am aware that I am myself still subject to this effect in making my present remarks, and I think it is fair to observe also that the effect is likely to have been especially marked among the students, given that the session libre represented a greater departure from

out, and not to argue a case for the session libre as a procedure of proven validity, I would say that I am personally satisfied that it is worth persevering with the approach embodied in the session libre, and it is my intention to try out this approach in the course of my work over here. For what it is worth in view of the reservations I have made, the informal comments of the majority of students suggested that the session libre had been amongst the most enjoyable of their learning experiences. I think everyone on the staff was gratified to find a very real hum of activity about the sessions libres, and the work executed by the students was to my mind of a generally high standard, particularly in effectiveness of communication. Though in the first one or two sessions libres the students showed some reticence in approaching the staff, as the sessions progressed, so the staff found themselves increasingly ... rushed off their feet dealing with queries on matters ranging from linguistic points to social and political developments in Anglophone countries.

An analysis of the hours spent by the students on each activity during the last session of the year indicated that the mean average distribution of time between activities was: Films 30%, Press 26%, Tape Library and Language Laboratory together 21%, Television 13% and Games 10%. These figures do not permit direct inference of the popularity of each activity because many confounding factors are involved. For example, three feature-films represented some seven hours of activity, or just about or slightly over 30% of the time available for all activities. Again, because staffing arrangements forced us to group Tape Library and Language Laboratory together for the purpose of attendance records, we do not know how the time spent on these activities broke down into listening hours and hours spent recording oral work. On the whole, however, the figures tend to conform with subjective impressions of the order of popularity, but it remains an order open to manipulation through modifications. For example, it was noticeable in Television that the main interest was in professionally-made television documentaries and dramatic pieces intended for adult native speakers of English. Next in order of popularity were Tom-and-Jerry type cartoons, but the students showed little or no interest in other programmes meant for younger English-speaking viewers and least of all in programmes specially designed for teaching English as a foreign language. As the stock of the more popular material was low, the position could well change with a greater accumulation of materials of this type, but in any case it is material which needs to be changed frequently. In the early sessions libres many students had probably seen nearly all of the more popular offerings, which were then by force of circumstance trotted out again and again.

As for Press, one always had the impression that it was a busy activity, and interests seemed evenly dispersed among the topics and materials available, from serious political issues in the daily press to recipes for steak-and-kidney pie in the women's magazines. It was a taxing activity for the staff, requiring great

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ingenuity when it came to explaining to a student engrossed in Punch the subtleties of British humour and in-jokes, but it had a very rewarding feel about it. It also provided opportunities for many spontaneous discussions on diverse topics, and together with the feature-films it prompted the greater part of the output of written work, which was frequently of positively frightening bulk when it came to marking.

In Tape Library there seemed again to be an even spread of interest over all the materials; news, personal interviews, light comedy programmes, short stories and folk and pop songs.

In Games, the overwhelming interest was in Scrabble, the other games remaining virtually untouched.

As the sessions progressed, various modifications were tried out. Though we had no rule about breaks, for example, and allowed the students to make the trip down to the second floor for coffee whenever they wished, we soon noticed that some were abusing the privilege of this freedom. Rather than impose further rules, however, we retaliated by introducing a further activity called "Cafeteria". For this we bought in a range of beverages which we re-sold at cost price, but in principle only to students who conducted their transactions in English with the member of staff manning the Cafeteria, who also invited the customer to sit down and have a chat. It did not really get off the ground as an activity, however, mainly because of the difficulties involved in manning it, but we kept it on as a facility run by the students themselves simply to obviate the necessity for a trip down to the second floor. Again, we tried out the idea of an hour's formal feedback session at the end of each day, for the purposes of which students met with their tutors in their normal groups, but abandoned it because it proved too costly of time.

A modification once made on the spur of the moment was prompted by the discovery that Family Life was showing in town in its original version, and we took the students off to see this in place of one of the feature-films we would otherwise have shown ourselves. But this was a mere stroke of luck, as was the fact that the film proved highly controversial, and sparked off some lively discussion on the following day.

Up to the present, very little would suggest to me at any rate that in instituting the session libre we went too far towards the opposite pole from that represented by the session classique. No doubt there is much room for refinement, but I would hope that such refinement would take the direction of exploring even further the possibilities for setting up an environment in which the learner can learn, rather than retracting towards the position that the environment must be suitable for the teacher to teach. There were, perhaps inevitably, a few complaints, but to my knowledge isolated ones, from students who were "bored" and "did not know what to do" and "wanted to be taught". As I shall suggest, these complaints may not have been trivial, and we should perhaps have done more to deal with them. But it would appear encouraging that the majority of students seemed to respond well to the new approach, and I noticed no general clamour for a return to more directive methods.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

So far I have minimised allusion to theoretical considerations connected with the session libre in order not to misrepresent the position of some colleagues by implying that the session libre was seen by everyone as a direct attempt to apply to the practice of language teaching a particular theory of teaching or learning. I can characterise my own position with a borrowing from Leonard Newmark (1971) who describes it as: "...the common-sense view that the best preparation for learning to use a language [is] observation of the language in use by others and experience in using the language oneself." I think it is obvious that the session libre is consistent with this view, but in expressing my own attitude I would add a caveat to the effect that in teaching the application of theory to practice is often fraught with paradox, and that teaching is not merely a matter of attempting straightforward application of theories of learning in the classroom. What ultimately matters to the teacher is not the elegance of a learning theory, but the results he produces, however he arrives at them. Therefore, while the session libre interests me as an application of an idea I subscribe to, what was ultimately at stake in trying out the session libre was to discover whether it looked like a technique which could work, and it was on this more pragmatic basis that agreement to try it out was reached. To just what extent its validity as a technique can be tested objectively remains open to question, since the difficulty of experimental work makes it doubtful whether there is any language-teaching technique in common use which has been endorsed more by scientific research than by the intuition and outlook of teachers. While there is, then, no a priori reason for not attempting a controlled experiment with the type of approach represented by the session libre, it would be over-optimistic to expect such a study to do more than pick out general tendencies. But again, there may well be little point in trying to compare the approach of the session libre with more directive approaches if these approaches derive from fundamentally different views about what the output of language teaching should be. For me, it is a corollary of the approach embodied in the session libre that the essential thing is to be able to communicate; it may be a corollary of more directive approaches that the aim is to produce grammatically correct sentences. Scientific research is plainly useless if it purports to compare by the same yardstick work which is undertaken to different specifications.

If, where the results of language teaching are concerned, one is not simply interested in linguistic mastery, or cognitive gain, in whatever form it may take, but also in attitudes, or affective gain, then, depending upon one's standpoint in relation to educational matters in general and language teaching in particular, there may already be some measure of both theoretical and experimental support for the approach implicit in the session libre. For instance, to quote from a study carried out by G.Stern (Sears and Hilgard 1964) in which non-directive and directive instruction were compared: "In general, it would

appear that the amount of cognitive gain is largely unaffected by the autocratic or democratic tendencies of the instructor." But, as he goes on to say: "...the results generally have indicated that non-directive instruction facilitates a shift in a more favorable, acceptant, direction." If the justification for language teaching is felt to lie primarily in helping students to communicate with others in the world around them rather than in training them in a mental discipline, then this type of finding could be pregnant with implications for language teaching. However, it would be wrong to conceal Stern's further finding that: "Non-directive instruction, as practiced by some instructors, is more laissez-faire than learner-centered, and may arouse latent anxieties in students of precarious ego-strength." This is the point I was leading up to when I said that the few complaints we did receive from students about the sessions libres may not have been trivial. It would doubtless be prudent in the future to bear in mind the problem of the student lacking in self-confidence and, if one may say so, the problem of the student trained by the educational system itself to depend so utterly on the authority of the teacher and his teaching that he feels the ground to have been removed from under his feet once this authority is renounced. But an improvement in monitoring, leading to firmer guidance and support for those students who needed it, would not be inconceivable within the open structure of the session libre and could fit into it very well.

While I would, then, see in the session libre sufficient flexibility to deal with each student's problems, linguistic and/or psychological, on an individual basis, I would still raise as a consideration appropriateness of approach in a more global sense. It is probably true that there are situations in which a strongly directive approach is not only expected but appropriate. I am thinking, for instance, of the intensive courses run by the Armed Services, which judging from what I have seen of them are from the linguistic point of view highly efficacious. That the approach is in general strongly directive almost goes without saying, but it is easy to see that it is entirely compatible with the total circumstances surrounding the courses, with their often very restricted objectives and with their need to be strictly cost-effective.

The principles on which Services courses are based have of course infiltrated the educational field since the Second World War , and they may indeed be applicable in this field in some instances - e.g. in intensive courses for no-nonsense businessmen whose immediate aims are to acquire an inventory of phrases with which to 'get by' while abroad, or perhaps in situations in which real 'cramming' is a necessity. The question is whether normal students undergoing normal full-time education fall into the same category as soldiers and businessmen and those who need to 'cram', even when their courses contain a training element. My own feeling is that they do not, and that where normal full-time education is concerned, there is an obligation to educate as well as to train. Educationists may have been too easily bedazzled by the immediately visible results of Services-type courses. If it is one of our aims in full-time education to produce the

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independent and critical thinker, the creative individual rather than the cog-in-the-wheel simply with a job to do, then I would question the applicability of a heavily directive approach as much in language teaching as in any other subject. Put positively, I would have thought that a minimally directive approach which presents the student with a maximally rich learning environment in which he can exploit to the full his inherent capacities for learning would provide not just adequate preconditions for language learning in the narrow sense, but a more fertile climate for the reception and communication of ideas.

GENERAL APPLICATIONS

I have of course used the session libre to raise a number of wider issues, and in my concluding remarks should perhaps give one or two indications as to how the session libre might be applied outside the immediate context in which it was created. As a matter of fact, an article by Professor Hawkins (1970) suggests that some of the same sort of principles as those underlying the session libre have already been applied in a limited way in certain sectors of education in this country, and I would like to see these principles extended. My guess is that despite the creative and imaginative work done by some institutions, the standard classroom situation, with its often near-arid linguistic environment, is still the predominant situation in which language teaching is conducted here or anywhere else. This may often have to do with economic factors, but if these are all it has to do with, then I would have thought that there was considerable scope for joint operations between the better-endowed and the more sparsely-endowed institutions, such that the linguistically underprivileged could from time to time enjoy the surroundings which the resources of modern technology and communications can create. Assuming also that the basic language teaching format in this country follows the extensive pattern, and is likely to go on doing so throughout the foreseeable future, then it would seem to me that something very much like the session libre would be highly appropriate as an additional dimension to many courses. To spell out something of what I am suggesting, the universities and polytechnics often have longer vacations than the schools, and in the schools terms tend to contain timetable gaps at the beginning and at the end. Thus it may be that there is a point of coincidence between idle equipment on the one hand and under-utilised time on the other.

In higher and further education, I can think of no non-trivial reason why the session libre could not be expressly built into timetables, whether for specialist, semi-specialist or non-specialist students of languages, and I would see no compelling paedagogical reasons for not putting together different categories and years of students in such situations, provided that they were not at very widely dissimilar levels in their language studies.

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Though I would imagine the session libre to be generally most practicable in a balanced extensive-intensive course programme, and would see its optimal length in this sort of situation as about that of the sessions in Nancy, I do not see why it should not be tried out as a pattern for intensive courses of several weeks' duration. In this connection, I note with interest (Morton et al. 1974) that something similar to an extended session libre is being tried out in engineering courses at Heriot-Watt University, though there the subject-matter itself takes the form of a definite 'syllabus'. The student, however, is free to organise his own study-pattern in this 'free format engineering course', and those who do not go along entirely with the idea of open-ended content in language courses, but nevertheless recognise the individuality of each learner and his approach to study, may well find in the paper of Morton et al. the sort of compromise between form and content which would encourage them to try out a 'free format language course'.

Would the session libre approach, insofar as it differs from some of the approaches already adopted for teaching languages to younger schoolchildren in this country, work for complete beginners ? Provided the selection of materials and activities was appropriate, I see no a priori reason why not. But I will not attempt to answer the question any more fully, since I should like to end by repeating that my main purpose is simply to suggest the session libre as a technique for other language teachers to try out for themselves, and if they find it successful, to add to the armoury of techniques they need for coping with varied situations. Just two words of warning here: Firstly, I am grateful to Dr Alan Davies for his observation that I seemed "too worried about the Hawthorne effect" to which I have alluded earlier, since, as he says, the Hawthorne effect is what needs to be kept up. In other words, student interest depends in great measure on variety, and I would consequently not wish these remarks on the session libre to be interpreted as a proposal for some new 'global method', which, like other 'global methods', would not only be totally inappropriate in some situations, but could, even when appropriate, become monotonous if over-used, particularly if the

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structure were to ossify around a limited range of activities. Secondly, intensive sessions in general are potentially double-edged weapons. In the language teacher's hands, they can be used to good educational effect. If they become part of the administrator's armoury, especially in circumstances in which there is very little total time available for language teaching on a particular course, they can be used very conveniently to 'get the language teaching out of the way', with more disappointing results from the language teacher's point of view than if the hours available are used extensively.

NOTES

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics, Nottingham, 1973.
2. The IUT, an unité de recherche et d'enseignement of the Université de Nancy II, is concerned with applied studies in subjects ranging from electrical engineering to commerce and communications. The major sites are in Nancy, but there are 'outposts' in Épinal and Longwy.
3. All courses of the IUT lead to the Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (about British HND standard). There are no 'specialist' language courses; languages are included in courses basically as 'tool elements'.
4. Summary: Objective, brief account of principal points.
   Commentary: Objective explanation of subject-matter and way in which author presents it.
   Criticism: Reasoned argument for or against the views of the author and/or his treatment of the subject.

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